

The naming of a great peak¹

THE BEAUTIFUL, snowcapped mountain you see directly to the west of the Queen City was first named as a monument to romance, only later to be reconsecrated to a hero of economic development. The sequence reminds us that a liaison between passion and economics goes back a long way in Western history.

The renowned landscape painter Albert Bierstadt came to frontier Denver in 1863, four years after its founding. He was a young buck of 33.

On June 17, with William N. Byers, pioneer editor and booster of our then-hamlet, the artist journeyed up Clear Creek to Idaho Springs, thence south along Chicago Creek to the base of the great mountain that broods over Denver.

Byers reported that the famous artist was "in raptures with the scenery. . . . There, upon suddenly turning the point of a mountain and entering a grassy little park, a vast amphitheater of snowy peaks, lofty cliffs, and timbered mountain sides burst suddenly upon the view. Patience vanished and in nervous haste canvas, paints, and brushes were unpacked and a couple of hours saw, under his skillful hands, some miles of mountains, hills, forests, and valley reproduced with all its vivid coloring, and the cloud shadows that were sweeping over it."

Bierstadt and Byers pushed on for more field sketches, and then climbed to the 14,264-foot summit to gaze out over the hazy, brown plains. They were the first Anglos to climb the peak.

According to Trenton and Hassrick's "The Rocky Mountains — A Vision for Artists in the 19th Century," Byers recalled that "as they stood on one of the loftiest summits in the world, a vast panorama of mountains, valleys, and plains was spread out before them . . . with the naked eye they could distinguish houses far off in the distance; with the aid of a powerful glass they traced the meanderings of the Platte and its tributaries for a hundred miles."

The awestruck Bierstadt, in those innocent days before government attended to such things, suggested they name the mountain. He chose "Rosalie" for the wife of Fitz Hugh Ludlow, an art critic friend who had come West with him. Apparently, this was more than a good-buddy gesture, since Rosalie became Mrs. Bierstadt three years later. Thus was our mountain at first dedicated to Cupid.

In 1866, Bierstadt, using his Colorado studies, finished his second great Western canvas, "A Storm in the Rocky Mountains — Mt. Rosalie," and the canvas went off to England and France for exhibition and critical acclaim from such as Queen Victoria and other crowned heads, an audience that would be the envy even of today's tourism promoters.

But while Albert was pining for Rosalie above timberline, down on Cherry Creek territorial Gov. John Evans was guiding the growing community through the perils of Indians and the Civil War, and later onto the railroad scene.

Evans and the other tribal fathers, including Byers, managed to organize the Denver Pacific Rail-



BILL
HORNBY

*Don't thought
this would interest
you. Best wishes,
Lou*

road to link to the Union Pacific at Cheyenne, in a truly remarkable exercise in economic development.

Grateful Greeley citizens first proposed in 1870 that the mountain to which they all looked up be named for Evans in gratitude for his efforts to secure the railroad, and thus some sort of economic future for the territory. The legislature confirmed this local enthusiasm in 1895, when on Governor Evans' 81st birthday they formally resolved that Mount Rosalie should be Mount Evans forever. A dedication to Mercury.

By this time, Bierstadt the panoramic romanticist was falling out of favor in the art world, and for all we know, perhaps with Rosalie. In any event, her name was dispatched by the authorities to a neighboring lower mountain, with the next-highest peak immediately west of Evans being named for Bierstadt himself. After all, his vast paintings were acknowledged the best promotion the 19th century Alps of America had had.

In his 1977 edition of "Fourteen Thousand Feet," the authoritative description of Colorado mountain names, the late John L. J. Hart confirms that Bierstadt is the only artist painter to have a 14,000-footer named for him. By a somewhat depressing comparison as far as we scriveners are concerned, editor Byers later picked up a namesake peak behind Winter Park. But at only 12,084 feet, it doesn't make the "highest" lists.

Hart wrote in 1977 that of 51 "fourteener" names then authorized, 19 were personal recognitions. Six were for politicians — Elbert, Lincoln, Evans, Bross, Windom and Stewart, of whom only Lincoln and his friend Evans are now recalled. Four explorers — Long, Kit Carson, Pike and Humboldt. A surveyor twice, Wilson; a miner, Handie; Bierstadt for the painters; a general, W. Tecumseh Sherman; two Indians, Antero and Shavano; and two scientists, Gray and Torrey. No scriveners.

In 1866, the Eastern writer Bayard Taylor, looking up at Mount Rosalie, thought that "in variety and harmony of form, in effect against the dark blue sky, in breadth and grandeur, I know of no external picture of the Alps that can be placed beside it."

Those of us who check on Mount Evans each morning to make sure it's there agree; but all the same, it's sort of sad about Rosalie.

Bill Hornby, whose column appears on Thursdays and Sundays, is senior editor of The Denver Post

1 The Denver Post, Sunday, March 3, 1987 (Section F, "Perspective", reference p. 5 F)